

Operations Rooms HMA Ships WW2

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My sea time was spent almost entirely in HMAS *Shropshire*, so I will describe my recollections of the situation as regards Operations Rooms in that ship.

In *Shropshire* we did not have a centralised Operations Room as I understand all ships now have. Instead we had a number of different locations each of which had a particular function. These were:

Navigation. Directly under the bridge was the Plotting Office. This had a table on which the appropriate chart would be spread under a glass panel. A spot of light from underneath was moved to follow the ship's course and speed, and the person on watch would mark its position at intervals. There was an opening above through which the chart could be viewed from the bridge. We had an American SG Radar with PPI display (the only PPI we had), mounted in the Plot.

Gunnery Control - Main Armament Surface Targets. The TS (Transmitting Station) was installed well down in the ship and forward of the boiler rooms. It was manned by Bandsmen with a Warrant Gunner in charge. The fire control table could be described as a 'mechanical computer', and was slightly smaller than a billiard table. Information fed into it would be:

- * Ship's course and speed

- * Target range available from either the optical rangefinder in the main armament director or from either of the 2 Radar displays in the TS. These were the 285 with antenna mounted on the main armament director or the 273 which was independent. At all times the Radar range was more accurate than the visual, although in good visibility there was little difference.

- * Target bearing. In conditions of good visibility visual bearing was more precise than Radar but in poor visibility or at night Radar bearing was adequate for the purpose. Target course and speed was estimated from this information, adjustments applied for wind etc, all providing the necessary data for setting the guns.

Gunnery Control - High Angle Guns. *Shropshire* had four twin mounts of 4 inch HA guns and a type 285 Radar with antenna mounted on the HA director. These guns were used for long range anti aircraft defence. They were controlled by a gun control table similar to but smaller than that in the TS.

Gunnery Control - Auto Barrage Units. We had four of these units, one for each main armament turret. I think that once the Gunnery Officer on the bridge had given an order to use a particular turret to attack a particular aircraft, control of the operation was the responsibility of the Gun Captain in the turret.

Aircraft Warning and Interception. Air plotting Office. This was the closest we had to a modern day Operations Room, manned by Radar Plot ratings and a Specialist Officer in charge. *Shropshire* was fitted with a 281 air warning Radar. It was a powerful piece of equipment based on the technology of long range Naval W/T. but required careful attention to all aspects of fine tuning and

maintenance as well as dedication to detail combined with great patience on the part of the operators to extract the best performance from it. Fortunately we had the right people to do that.

The information on positions of aircraft both enemy and friendly was recorded on a chart using the call sign "Porthole". The name "Porthole" was held in high esteem throughout the fleet and all members of the ship's company were proud to be associated with it.

Regarding other ships, I think that cruisers and destroyers would have had similar decentralised arrangements for navigation and gunnery control, taking into account the guns fitted. Their air warning Radar would have been used simply for air warning reporting directly to the bridge. HMAS Australia may have had an Air Plotting Office, but it would have been much simpler than in Shropshire. The reason that *Shropshire* was different was that before the hand over from the RNB, a complete set of current Radar and associated equipment was fitted.